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U.S. Department of the Interior

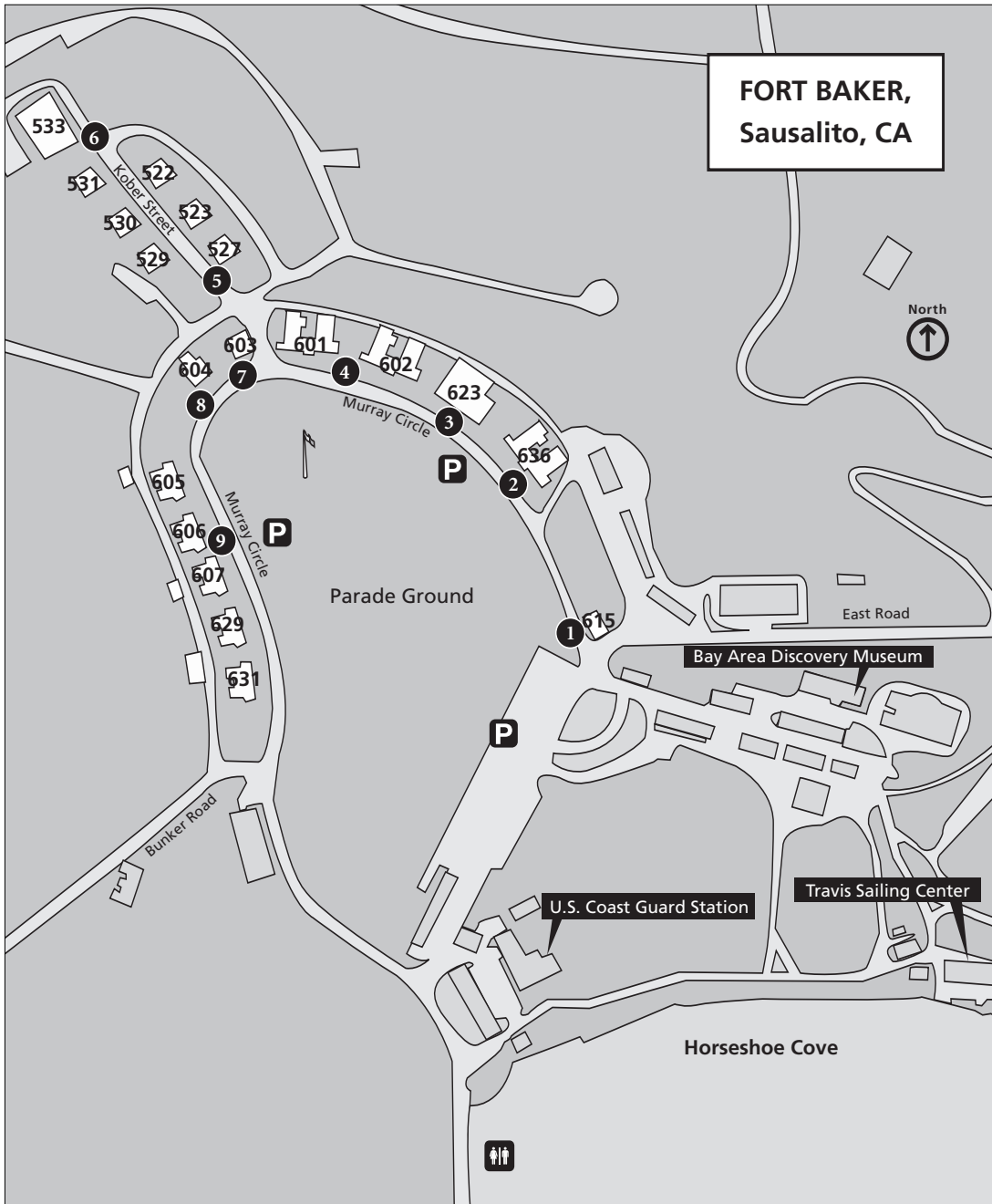
Fort Baker
Golden Gate National Recreation Area



Fort Baker History Walk

Innovations in Army Post Life





The U.S. Army established Fort Baker in 1897 to support the many seacoast defense batteries located around the north side of the Golden Gate straits. The design and architecture of this army post was a departure from earlier, western military forts. Fort Baker represented a new model for Army life, in which both the enlisted soldiers and the officers enjoyed a much higher standard of living

The Route

Length: 1/2 mile

Number of Stops: 9

Time required: about 45 minutes

Access: The route is paved but watch for steps and cracked pavement. There is one steep uphill walk to the historic hospital building at Stop # 6.

Portable Toilets are located along the fishing pier at the waterfront.

If you have any questions, please stop by the Marin Headlands Visitor Center (415) 331-1540. The Visitor Center is located in the historic Fort Barry Chapel, at the intersection of Field and Bunker Roads, approximately 3 miles west of here.

Start the tour at the foot of the parade ground, at Building 615, the small single story building, so that you are facing north, looking at the flag pole (see the map).

On the cover: Aerial photograph of Fort Baker, dated 1915.



1

Main Parade Ground:

The Establishment of Fort Baker

By the turn of the century, a major construction campaign began at Fort Baker to provide permanent housing for the newly reorganized Coast Artillery Corps, stationed here to man seven seacoast defense batteries [Ridge Battery (1871), Battery Cavallo (1872), Battery Spencer (1897), Battery Duncan (1900) Battery Kirby (1900), Battery Orlando-Wagner (1901), and Battery Yates (1905)]. Most of the buildings around the parade ground that you see today were built between 1902 and 1910. (photo circa 1905).

To appreciate the significance of Fort Baker, it helps to understand the challenges of earlier routine Army life during the late 19th century. The soldiers' work was often physically demanding and tedious, and their military pay rarely covered their own necessities. The small frontier posts were a collection of drafty, run-down barracks that were poorly ventilated, with no running water, separate bathrooms or electricity. The food was often poor quantity and in short supply and the soldiers' uniforms were made of shoddy, ill-fitting material. It is easy to understand why encouraging responsible men to join the Army was not easy; most of the men who enlisted in the Army felt they had no other choice; they were often either in trouble with the law or flat-out broke.

But much of this miserable life was about to change. The peace-time years between the Civil War (1865) and the Spanish-American War (1898) were a time of great improvement for the U.S. Army. The Army now turned its energy toward improving the living conditions of enlisted soldiers,

in order to stem desertion, boost morale and attract a better class of recruits. Fort Baker was designed and built at the same time that the Army was instituting new policies to improve a soldier's life. These new military policies dramatically influenced how the Army built their buildings; by the turn-of-the-century, the Army was creating a new military architecture and these changes can be easily identified at Fort Baker.

Begin to walk up the hill, along side the parade ground, and stop at the first large white building on your right-hand side.

2

Building 636, Soldiers' Barracks:

The Construction of a New & Better Army Post

You are standing in front of a barracks where 109 enlisted soldiers lived, slept, ate and bathed. These barracks represented 'state-of-the-art' military housing when completed in 1903. Earlier military housing had been much different. During the late 1800s, army medical officers were appalled by the soldiers' living conditions at the frontier posts. Two to three men would often share one bug-ridden, make-shift bed, in an already damp and cramped



This military barracks' interior shows the new, more spacious dormitory design. (photo circa 1915).

barrack. Many posts only owned one bath tub for fifty men; it was not uncommon for the men to bath only once a month.

But by the early 1900s, the Army began to design larger, healthier barracks with an new emphasis on proper ventilation, clean running water and modern toilet facilities. This Fort Baker barracks was designed with open, spacious wards, numerous windows and real beds and mattresses. All the Fort Baker buildings were built with electricity, hot and cold running water and a sufficient number of proper toilets and shower facilities. The first floor contained a large kitchen, mess hall (a communal dining room) and a day room (a communal living room). The dormitories were located on the first and second floor, where the enlisted soldiers slept in one large room and the noncommissioned officers, usually unmarried lieutenants and captains, slept in separate private rooms. The bathroom facilities were in the basement and each barracks even had its own tailor and barber shop.

Continue up the hill and stop at the next building on your right, which is the post gymnasium.

3

Building 623, Post Gymnasium: *A Soldier's Life Improves*

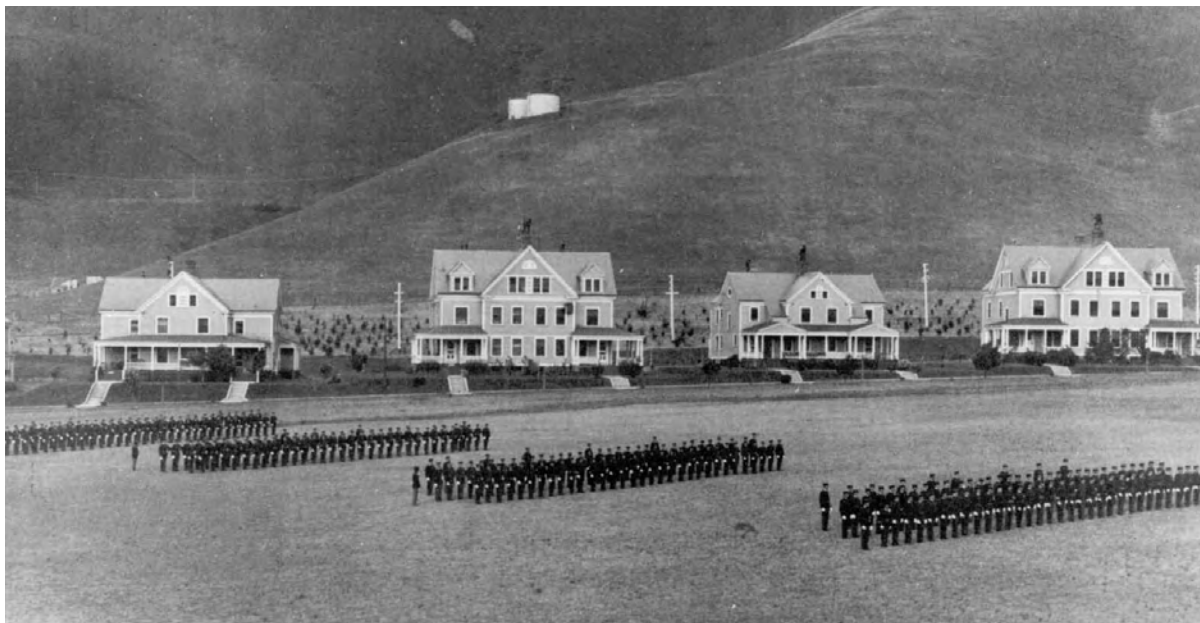
Life at Fort Baker illustrates other improvements made for the soldiers. In addition to raising the soldiers' pay, providing new uniforms, and improving housing, the Army also began to sponsor facilities and activities to help alleviate the monotony of army life. The post exchange system, which offered soldiers recreation, beer and general dry goods at a fair price, was established. The Army placed a new emphasis on physical activity, and in addition to the formation of baseball teams, football teams and marching bands, most new Army posts included some kind of gymnasium space. The Army also provided schooling, teachers, text books and libraries to help educate the men.



Soldiers playing baseball on the Fort Baker main parade ground. Note that the wood-frame barracks in the background originally had front porches and that the brick gymnasium, to the right, was then unpainted. (photo circa 1905).

The Fort Baker gymnasium, in front of you, was originally constructed as a fully-equipped exercise facility, with a basketball courts, climbing ropes, jump horses, flying rings, tumbling mats and striking bags. The gymnasium also included a school room and reading room, a post exchange, a lunch counter and kitchen, and a bowling alley.

Continue up the road and stop at either of the last two buildings on the right hand side.



The Fort Baker parade ground was an essential military open space dedicated to drills, marches, parades and public ceremonies. Note how bare the landscape was originally. In 1905, when this photo was taken, trees were planted in a semi-circle behind the buildings to help create much needed wind breaks and to add a more finished appearance to the post.

4

Buildings 601/602, Artillery Barracks: *Colonial Revival Architecture at Fort Baker*

These soldier barracks, like most of the Fort Baker buildings constructed between 1902 and 1910, were designed in the Colonial Revival architectural style. The goal of this architectural style, which favored clean, simple lines and a minimal use of applied decoration, was to inspire a sentimental remembrance of the early history of the United States, a time when American democracy was in its infancy.

The Colonial Revival style is often characterized by large, stocky symmetrical buildings with classical elements, such as columns, porches and wide windows. The Fort Baker buildings were originally painted dark greens and browns and had gray slate roofs. By the 1930s, in an effort to match the other Bay Area army posts, like the Presidio, the Army re-

painted the Fort Baker buildings an off-white color and replaced the slate roofs with red asphalt shingles. All three barracks were originally constructed with two-story front porches; the porches were removed in the 1950s.

You are now at the top of the parade ground. Please turn left and walk up to Kober Street.

5

Kober Street: Modest Military Housing

As you walk up Kober Street, notice the modest, noncommissioned officers' duplex housing, on either side of the street. The scale and location of these homes reflect the lower rank of the occupants. The officers lived in the large homes directly on Murray Circle, while the noncommissioned officers lived in these smaller residences, away from the heart of the post. Originally, the building plans for Fort Baker specified brick but the first round of construction bids came in too high. As a result, most of the Fort Baker buildings were constructed in wood-frame. The two brick buildings on Kober Street are the only masonry res-



The noncommissioned officers' housing along Kober Street was constructed between 1903 and 1909. Notice the rustic fence and the sparse landscaping. [photo courtesy of the Sausalito Historical Society] (photo circa 1905).

idences. The single-family residence up the hill was constructed specifically for the Fort Baker hospital steward.

*Continue up the hill to Building 533, the Post Hospital.
This is a slow but steep hill, so please take your time.*

6

Building 533 Post Hospital: *A Healthier Army*

You are standing in front of the Fort Baker Hospital, which was constructed as a 12-bed hospital in 1902. Changes in the Army medical health care system are also apparent at Fort Baker. Before the turn-of-the-century, sick soldiers were treated in drafty, temporary buildings. They often had to wait long intervals for the traveling doctor to visit if their post did not have an assigned surgeon. Due to inadequate



The Fort Baker Hospital was designed and constructed during the same era as the Presidio's Letterman Army Hospital complex. While the Fort Baker Hospital was much smaller in scale, both hospitals were designed with more space and better ventilation. This photo of a ward at the Letterman Army Hospital illustrates the improved medical conditions at an early 20th century military hospital. (photo circa 1910).

sleeping and bathing situations, diseases such as small pox, yellow fever and cholera remained rampant within army life.

As the medical community began to better understand germs and their relationship to diseases, the Army began to place a new emphasis on cleanliness, water purification, proper ventilation, liberal use of disinfectants and quarantines. By the 1880's, all posts were required to submit monthly sanitation reports and the first newly created Army Medical School provided more medical training. The Army began to construct large, permanent hospital buildings on post. The combination of these medical advances resulted in a much healthier army, with a dramatic drop in medical illnesses.

The Fort Baker Hospital had a medical store room and vegetable cellar in the basement, and an open, well-ventilated ward room, medicine dispensary, kitchen and mess hall on the first floor. The second floor contained an operating room, a laboratory and an isolation ward for communicable diseases.

Now walk back down the hill until you reach Murray Circle again. Take a right and stop in front of Building 603, the Post Headquarters Building, where the Commanding Officer had his formal offices.

7

Building 603 Post Headquarters:

“WANTED: 100 men for service....”

Army recruitment offices around the country posted “wanted” signs in the hopes of enticing men into joining the army. Why did these men enlist during peace-time? Civilian life did not always offer job security; unemployment often influenced men to enlist because they saw life in the Army as a secure job when other possibilities did not exist. Many men wanted adventure, to ride horses and to see the West. Some men, including the African-American soldiers and recent immigrants, joined the Army because it offered a better quality of life and an opportunity to gain an education with the hope of advancement.

Who were the men stationed at Fort Baker? The 1910 census of Fort Baker provides us with valuable information about the enlisted soldiers and officers. Most of the enlisted men were in their 20s, unmarried and from the Northern, Western and Midwestern states. The single enlisted men listed professions such as cooks, tailors, musicians and mechanics; the married officers were identified as majors, sergeants, and captains. Most of the Fort Baker men were second generation Americans, while some of soldiers’ parents were foreign-born. About one out of every fifteen soldiers stationed here was an immigrant from another country such as Germany, Poland, Sweden, Ireland, England, Portugal, Austria and Hungary.

Continue walking to your left and stop at the next large residential building.



Enlisted musicians (photo circa 1905).

8

Building 604, Commanding Officer's Residence:
A Prominent Home

You are now standing in front of the Commanding Officer's residence, built in 1903. To help reinforce the commanding officers' status on post, the army intentionally constructed their homes at prominent sites, like it is here at Fort Baker. This residence, with seven bedrooms and four bathrooms, is the largest on post. Building 604 is also the most embellished building with metal-pressed ceilings, fireplaces with decorative mantels and a built-in buffet in the dining room. This building, with its formal dining room, living room and library, was also designed for social functions. The commanding officer and his wife were expected to host a variety of parties and dinners to important visiting military and civilian dignitaries. These large social events could not have been possible without the help of servants; the servant quarters are located on the third floor and the building has a separate servant staircase in the rear.

Continue walking down the other side of Murray Circle and stop in front of the group of duplex housing with the large front porches.



The Commanding Officer's Residence and Headquarters (photo ca 1910).

9

Building 605, 606 & 607, Officers' Housing: *Army Family Life*

Before Fort Baker was established, the frontier outposts were predominantly a bachelor society. The army strongly discouraged married junior officers and soldiers were specifically forbidden to marry (even though many of them did marry). If an officer had a wife and children, they were to be left behind at home. If the families were determined to follow the husbands to their tour-of-duty, the army made no provisions for them. Several groups of families and servants were often forced to live together in deteriorated, abandoned buildings as make-shift housing.

But by the turn-of-the-century, as part of the effort to improve morale, officers were now allowed to bring their families with them. You are standing in front of duplex housing that was built in 1902-1904 for captain and lieutenant's families; each family would occupy one-half of the building. These large homes, with ornate dining rooms, elegant living rooms and numerous bedrooms, became the new model for family life on post. Each residence was built to accommodate a large family as well as the live-in servants who were necessary to support the family's needs. The quality of this new housing design reflects the Army's new acceptance of families within the military community.



An officer's family outside officers' quarters. (photo circa 1905).

This marks the end of the Fort Baker tour. As a result of many Army-mandated changes to military policies, a soldier's everyday life was greatly improved by the late 19th century. These important changes are well articulated in both the design and function of Fort Baker's historic buildings. After over 100 years of military activity, this historic post will be converted to civilian use and will be maintained into the future by the National Park Service and its park partners.

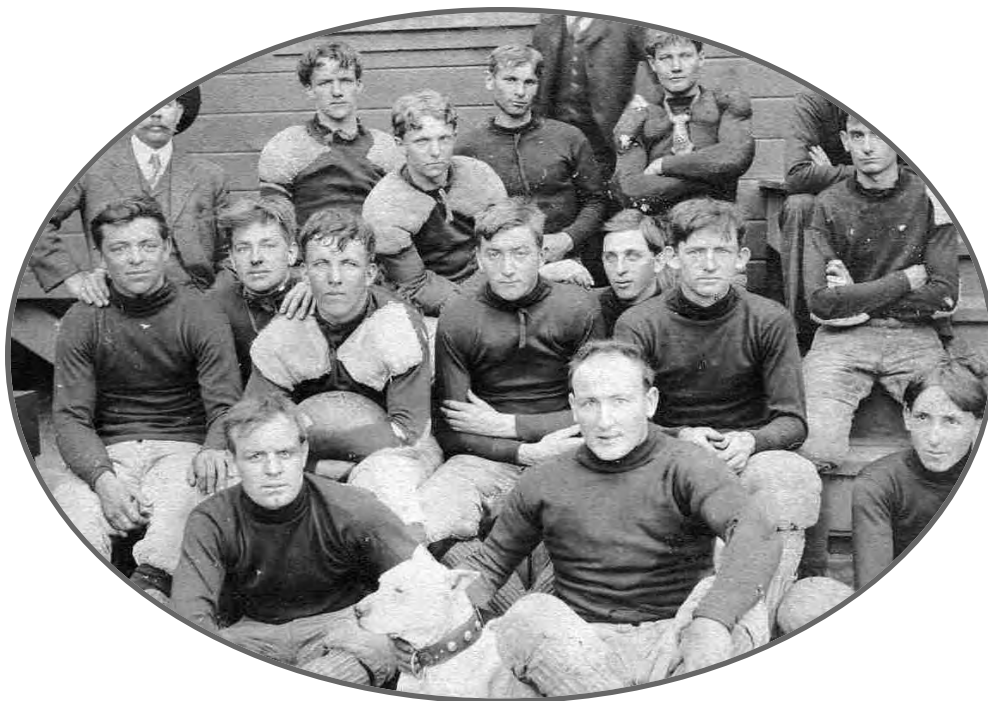


An officer's family's baby (photo circa 1905).



Golden Gate National Recreation Area
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(415) 561-4700
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www.nps.gov



Fort Baker football team
(photo courtesy of John Martini; date unknown).